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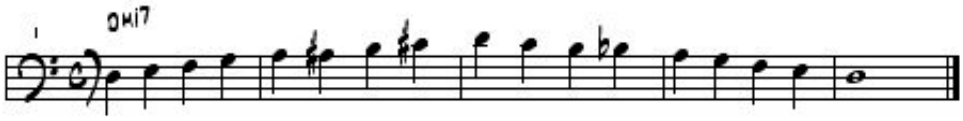
Modal walking bass lines

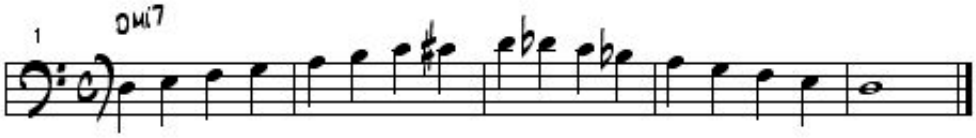
On modal jazz compositions like So What, Impressions and any minor blues the chord scales are often indicated. For example “Dmin7 use D Dorian”. This is fine for soloing at a basic level. However, creating walking bass lines using pitches only from this scale is quite difficult since the Dorian scale doesn’t have any leading tones ti-do and is a 7 note scale. Below are some suggestions on how to create more effective lines.

1) This example shows an ascending and a descending scale that contains leading tones and passing tones that will make the line flow and give it a stronger sense of forward motion towards a goal. It is essentially an ascending D melodic minor scale with a #5 chromatic passing tone and a descending D dorian with a b6 chromatic passing tone.

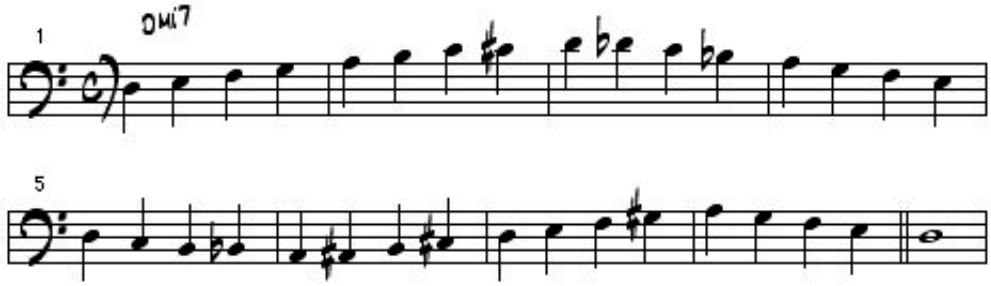


Notice how this 8 note scale makes line line flow and naturally end on the root on the downbeat two bars later thus keeping a strong sense of the harmony. It is important to have the bass outline the the harmony that is being played. The most basic concept for this is to have the bass play chord tones on the strong beat in each bar. The strong beats are 1 & 3. As we can see above does this scale have Root, 3rd, 5th and 6th on the strong beats and are therefore outlining a D min6 chord.

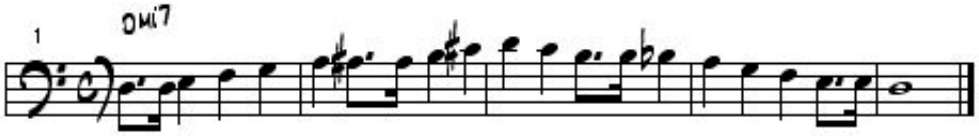
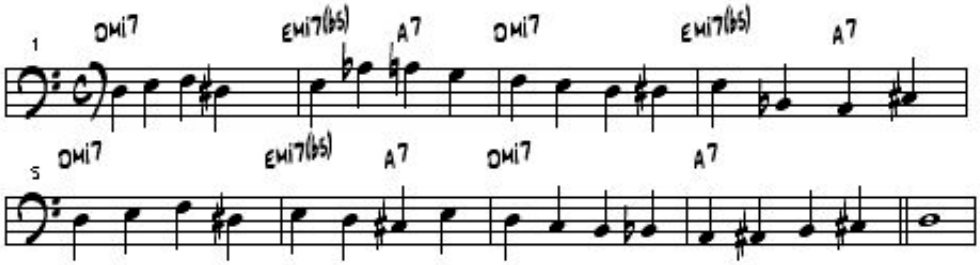
2) In this example are are an ascending/ descending scale very similar to the above but with different chromatic passing tones. Ascending is a D dorian scale with a #7 passing and leading tone. Descending we have a D Aeolian with a b1 passing tone.



Feel free to make up combinations of the two scale patterns shown above as shown below.



Below is the same scales with some rhythmic embellishment. Note how differently these effect the feel depending on which beat they are placed.



One way to find variation for the scaler lines is to imply a II-V harmonic progression. We are actually already implying a Vdom7 in the every other bar in the examples above. This won't really take away the feel of modality. It creates more variety both for the comping instruments as well as for the soloist.